

INCOMING TELEGRAM

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During long conversation June 29, Bishop Chi of Bui Chu gave me his version of French withdrawals from southern five provinces of delta. He began by saying that he had discounted rumors which he first heard about a month ago that such a withdrawal was going to take place. He had, nevertheless, obtained at that time assurances from General Cogny that French would hold area. These assurances had been repeated several times subsequently, most recently just over a week ago. In spite of these assurances, withdrawal of artillery and heavy equipment from periphery posts began about a week ago and this movement had been subsequently extended to provincial centers. Withdrawal of French Union Forces began soon after and at present moment, according to Bishop Chi, there are no (repeat no) French Union Forces left in town of Bui Chu. He said he came to Hanoi to attempt obtain reversal this movement, but has been completely unsuccessful in his endeavors. He added that neither Governor Tri nor Vietnamese commander of Third Military district had been officially informed of these French plans before they were put into effect. He said he had succeeded in bringing about 200 priests and seminary students to Hanoi.

Bishop Chi explained that he remained in close touch with his province and that these withdrawals and manner in which they were being carried out were arousing most serious anti-French sentiment among population. He said he understood that many Vietnamese Army units, National Guard and militia groups were refusing to obey orders to leave. He added that Governor Tri had ordered provincial officials to stay at their jobs until last possible minute. According to him, there was talk of what he termed a "coup d'etat" in the area. He had heard that certain Vietnamese officers who had transmitted French orders to withdraw were being singled out as "traitors to Vietnam" with implication that accounts would be settled with them. He felt that events of next few days might produce most dangerous point yet reached in relations between Vietnamese, real nationalists in his words, and French.

He said that he understood Ngo Dinh Diem had telegraphed French Government on June 25 to effect that if withdrawals were not (repeat not) stopped he would declare Vietnam's independence

Noted by DCI  
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outside French Union. As a result, he said French had reportedly agreed to delay withdrawal from towns of Phat Diem, Nan Dinh, and Bui Chu. (This may be Chi's version of delay allegedly obtained from Salan which was mentioned by Ngo Dinh Nhu to Kidder, reported EMBTEL 2924 to Department, repeated Paris 1039). According to Bishop Chi, he could find no (repeat no) one in Hanoi who would confirm this delay and he said, according to information which he had just received from Bui Chu, no (repeat no) one down there was aware of this delay. He questioned, moreover, whether withdrawal had not (repeat not) proceeded too far to be reversed.

Bishop Chi said he had also just received word that Viet Minh regular forces had also withdrawn from immediate vicinity of town of Bui Chu. He explained this action, as well as relative lack Viet Minh interference French withdrawal on basis prior agreement between French and Viet Minh. Early in conversation he introduced possible existence such an agreement as a feasible hypothesis. Towards end our talk, he told me on most confidential basis that French officer who was old friend had told him three days ago that current withdrawals were being made under agreement which French had reached with Viet Minh several weeks ago. Chi said that it looked as though situation in town of Bui Chu was shaping up so that a task force of Viet Minh political commissars could take over.

He talked of local resistance by nationalist elements population and Vietnamese National Army and asked whether US would be prepared assist with supplies, weapons and advice. He emphasized that time had come for US to deal directly with Vietnamese in these matters.

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